Castlemaine Naturalist

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Arrangements

BOCA CHALLENGE BIRD COUNT

DEC. I, 2001

Meet - at the Octopus (the old Tourist Info. Centre) opposite the Castle Motel in Duke St at 8.15 am.

Suggested **Starting Time** - 8.30 am

Suggested **Lunch Break** for 2 x ½ day trips - 12.15 to 1pm at the Octopus.

All groups to **return** to the Octopus **by 5.30pm** for compilation of Survey.

Ken and Maureen Dredge, Leaders.

Gibraltar Range National Park
World Heritage Area

We decided to spend a day in this area eighty kilometres from Grafton on the Gwydir Highway towards Glen Innes, and after a very scenic drive via Jackadgery and winding up the mountains through splendid rainforest, we arrived in time for lunch at the picnic area adjoining the Granite Loop Walk. Large numbers of Pied Currawongs indicated good reasons for the signs requesting visitors not to feed them.

The Walk proved to be more of a scramble among the granite rocks on the dry side of the mountain, but negotiable for elderly fold such as myself, if reasonably fit. There were grand vistas of surrounding ranges and river valleys, and very unusual plants; strange hakeas, calistemons and small conifers completely unknown to us, as well as more familiar purple Wild Iris, heaths and tall clumps of white everlastings. Later I spoke to a young friend who works on contract at times for NSW Parks and Wildlife, and she informed us that the uniqueness of the plants was one of the reasons for World Heritage listing.

After lunch and a two kilometre drive down the mountain we were in the Washpool rainforest of jungle-like vegetation and crystal clear streams (reminiscent of Sherbrook forest when we lived at Kallista over 50 years ago before the blackberries and feral cats had taken it over!) There was an abundance of Lyrebirds in this area which was obvious from the innumerable scratchings along the path, and the loud calls and mimicry close by.

We had afternoon tea at a roadside stop on our journey down the mountain towards Grafton as we headed back to Wooli. There were King Parrots feeding near us, and more Wild Raspberries.

As we left the mountains we stopped to investigate a road kill near a lush jungle-clad creek, and sadly we identified a handsome Red-necked Pademelon.

Shirley Parnaby.

PS One day is quite inadequate for this place, but better than nothing! S.P.

A Dry Ending

During the recent Elmore Field Days I was given advice from a snake expert that if confronted by a snake the best response is to freeze. He also said that a loss of bladder control was a distinct possibility but this was acceptable because the snake would be the only witness and unlikely to gossip.

I got the chance to put this advice to the test on Oct. 31 around noon. I was at work on a property at Glenhope where 200 acres of bush was being fenced of by a Green Corps crew of ten. I was ahead of the crew, clearing branches from the line of new fencing, when the leader of the crew called me back to have a look at two Red-bellied Black Snakes mating.

The snakes , both about 180 cm in length, were between the dam and an old netting fence approximately 10 metres away. Watching were eleven very fortunate and totally amazed people immersed in this liquid scene. The two snakes were rolling, intertwined, up against the old netting fence. As one snake rolled its head over the other, the other in turn mirrored its actions. The speed of this twisting and looping caused their tails to flick apart. the scene lasted for about 10 minutes until both snakes rose 40 cm in the air while still intertwined, looked at each other, then broke apart.

One snake headed to a pile of stumps, the other headed for the dam. Ten Green Corps crew moved quickly away and I, hoping that the snake expert was right, stayed put and froze. The snake passed within 30 cm of my left foot and before half of it had passed it stopped to have a drink at the dam. I stood still and watched it drink then slowly swim across the dam. The snake expert was right except for one thing, and I have ten witnesses to prove I didn't!

Craig Moody

Grampians Bush Month, October 2001

During October Geoff and I visited two properties opened as part of the Trust for Nature Bushmonth programme.

Aquila-Mount Abrupt Eco Lodge, on Saturday 13/10 and the Flora McDonald Grassy Woodland on Sunday 14/10.

The first is the Bjerking Property, Manns Rd, Dunkeld, 5km north of Dunkeld (Vic Roads 73 G3, Ph 5577 2582). As described in the brochure - "This lovely property consisting of 40 hectares (100 acres) of scrubby woodland is situated in the lower slopes of Mt. Abrupt. The woodland area is Messmate and Stringbark, with a dense and varied understorey including banksias, grevilleas and grass trees." Barbara Bjerking has a fine knowledge of orchids and has so far discovered 49 native orchids (approximately 15 which flower in October) and claims she will be disappointed when she is no longer able to discover a new orchid each year! The property also provides habitat for fauna including kangaroos, wallabies, echidnas and many birds.

We were led on a walk by David and Lynne Munro who are members of Friends of Grampians, Gariwerd (FROGG) and Stawell and Hamilton Field Nats. Afterwards Barbara showed us through the varied accommodation available at the lodge: a round house, a tree house and a loft house which are all solar powered.

Our plant list for the day was:-

Large White Spider Orchid (*Caledenia venusta*), Plain-lipped Spider Orchid (*C. clavigera*), Greencomb Spider Orchid (*Caledenia sp*), Musk Caledenia (*C. gracilis*), Pink Caledenia (*C. carnea*), Bronze Caledenia (*C. iridescens*), Heart-lip Spider Orchid (*C. cardiochila*), Nodding Greenhood (*Pterostylus nutans*), Tall Greenhood (*P. longifolia*), a blue sun orchid which was not open, Salmon Sun Orchid (*Thelymitra rubra*), Blotched Sun Orchid (*T. benthamianna*), Wallflower (Donkey) Orchid (*Diurus corymbosa*), Purplish Beard Orchid (*Calochilus robertsonii*), Wax-lip Orchid (*Glossodia major*), Brown Stringybark (*Euc. baxteri*), Roughbark Manna (*E. viminalis ssp cygnetenses*), Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*), Cyprus Pine/Port Jackson Pine/Oyster Bay Pine (*Callitris rhomboidea*), bracken, saw sedge Horny Cone-bush (*Isopogon ceratophyllus*), Love Creeper (*Comesperma volubile*), Spreading Heath (*Brachyloma depressum*), Daphne Heath (*B. daphnoides*), Flame heath (*Astroloma conostephoides*), Variable Prickly Grevillea (*Grevillia aquafolium*), Flame Grevillea (*Grevillea dimorpha* - narrow leaf form), Snow Myrtle (*Calytrix alpestris*), Common Fringe Myrtle (*C. tetragona*), Chocolate Lily (*Arthropodium strictum*), Native Cherry/Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*), Heath Tea-tree (*Leptospermum myrsinoides*), Running Postman (*Kennedia*

prostrata), Pale Sundew (*Drossera peltata*) and Blue Pincushion (*Brunonia australis*).

Geraldine Harris

(To be continued - second property , Feb. CN)

Birds at the Golf Course, October

October was a good month for birds, and visitors included 38 Great Cormorants with a Darter, and a Royal Spoonbill, which is very seldom seen in this area. Others were Dusky Woodswallows, Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes, Grey Teal, Richards Pipit, Black-shouldered Kite, two Australasian Grebes, Hoary-headed Grebe, Restless Flycatcher, Spotted and Striated Pardalotes, lots of Crested Shrike-tits, Brown Treecreepers, Great Egret, White-necked Heron, White-browed Scrub-wrens, Black-tailed Native-hens, Black-chinned, Brown Headed, Yellow-tufted and White-naped Honeyeaters, Olive-backed Oriole, and a query Rufous Songlark.

Debbie Worland

"Farming with the Future in View", Harris Property

13/11/01

After a car shuffle we started at the old foot bridge, noting the careful willow removal from the same and the site of broom removal from the west bank of the creek. We walked up the southern valley looking out for signs of germination as a result of the direct seeding and also noting the planting along the southern fence line.

Ern Perkins identified some native plants in the back corner:- Honeypots (*Acrotriche serrulata*); Curved Riceflower (*Pimelea curviflora*); Slender Riceflower (*C. linifolia*); Stinking Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle laxiflora*); Rock Fern (*Cheilanthes austrotenufolia*); Small St John's Wort (*Hypericum graminium*); Common Raspwort (*Gonocarpus tetragonus*); Variable Plantain (*Plantago varia*); slender (Swamp) Dock (*Rumex brownii*); Hill Wallaby Grass (*Danthonia eriantha*); Magenta Storks-bill (*Pelargonium rodneyanum*); Chocolate Lily (*Arthropoduim strictum)* - unfortunately I started talking and stopped note-taking at this stage!

We walked through the planting on our White Box (*Euc. albens*) hill and then down through the central corridor to the creek, noting all the while any signs of germination along the direct seeding furrows. We wandered along the creek noting the size of the burnt willow butts left behind and the growth of the plants, as well as the weeds and grasses that are also in abundance following the spring rains! The creek has a good variety of shallow riffle areas and deep pools all the away along its length on the property. We arrived at the northern end of the creek just in time for a brief

afternoon tea stop and some discussion about the progress of the site and the large task still ahead before rain sent everyone to their cars and home.

Geraldine Harris.

Observations

• Natalie de Maccus brought a specimen of Curved Riceflower from her block for the specimen table for identification.

• Stuart Morris reported more leek orchids on the Monk, but only one Crimson Spider Orchid where there are usually as many as thirty. There were many more Greencomb Spider Orchids. He felt the dominating colour for October was yellow, with scores of Billy Buttons, Bulbine Lilies etc. He also reported a very good show of Tiger Orchids *Diurus sulphurea* on the tourist road in Kalimna Park and numbers of blue, possibly Scented, Sunorchids near the Harcourt Church of Christ early in the month.

• John and Jacqui Turnbull spent a few days at Port Fairy, and John told of watching the Short-tailed Shearwaters coming in to the nests at dusk in thousands, flying and swooping around their heads and eventually flying straight into the nest burrows. While they were away the two kangaroos they had been fostering jumped the fence and made off into the bush. On 14/11 John told me they occasionally turn up at the house, or he sees them with the local mob when he goes for a walk. From all accounts the wild kangaroos can't quite make out what they should do when the Turnbull roos go over to John for a treat of sunflower seed! A large male Echidna was seen wandering around on their property late one afternoon, too.

• Later in the month about a kilometre away a large male Echidna was seen by Simon Whatley at this house. The males wander far and wide at mating time. Perhaps this was the same one?

• Barry Singleton has found one of the Crimson Spider Orchids in Kalimna again. (The specimens in Kalimna were particularly fine ones, of a deep crimson, but someone had dug five of the specimens up years ago, but it seems that one at least has survived. Ed.)

• Sugar Gliders have been very active in the flowering Yellow Box trees on the Harris property. Geoff commented on the sound of their scuffling in the trees. Geraldine reported that they have about 20 different orchid species in the residual casurina area of the property, and Natasha told of finding two fledgling Red-rumped Parrots in a nest in a fence post on the property and a Spotted Pardalote nesting in a small heap of soil.

• Doris Boyer, who lives in Lyttleton Avenue, on the edge of the CBD, reported hearing a Boobook calling in the early hours of Thursday 22/11.

• Lloyd and Betty Curtis have found a Sacred Kingfisher in the gully behind their house in north Castlemaine.

• With an article for the CN Ian Johnston, dropped in a specimen of Sweet Hounds Tongue (*cynoglossum sauveolens*) found in Specimen Gully Road.

Lake Wendouree

At Lake Wendouree recently, and with few minutes to spare after lunch at the Pavilion, I set off hopefully along the short section of the wetlands nearby. The sheltered water was a hive of activity. Many Reed Warblers were vocal and visible among the reeds, a Black Swan sat patiently on her large circular nest, a pair of Purple Gallinule (Swamp-hens) fed their four lanky half-grown youngsters lined up in the shallow water, and many Dusky Moorhen chicks rushed to conceal themselves. Best of all, a pair of Blue-billed Ducks fed and dived discreetly at the edge of the reed clumps. Two American tourists were delighted to have their attention drawn to the ducks, and waited with camera at the ready, as I continued back to the car.

Returning home via Creswick I was surprised to see an Echidna crossing the road just out of the town, in the vicinity of the LandCare turn-off. Echidnas are mentioned in the early history of the Creswick area, but were completely absent during my childhood, and through later years. A phone call to my sister established that they are indeed returning, and there have been a number of recent sightings.

Shirley Parnaby

Urban LandCare Group to be Formed

In case you missed it! There is an advertisement in the Castlemaine Mail, Fri. Nov. 23, by Mount Alexander Shire Council, announcing a public meeting to be held to discuss the formation of a LandCare group for the Castlemaine Township.

It is to be held in the Ray Bradfield Rooms on Thurs. Dec. 13 at 7.30pm.

This is the day before the general meeting. If you are interested in "protecting and restoring the town's natural resources" be sure to be there!

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 22/11/01

Information and booking forms for the **VFNCA Campout** at Tylden in March are **available**. Two of our members Ern Perkins and George Broadway, are leading excursions. The theme of the camp will be Volcanoes and Mineral Springs of Central Victoria. Julian Hollis, who spoke at one of our own meetings a couple of years ago, and led an excursion to Blue Mountain, near Trentham, the next day will be one of those involved.
It isn't all geology, but insects, birds, mammals, eucalypts and aquatic invertebrates all are subjects for excursions. There is even an early morning and an evening excursion.

With all best wishes to everyone for a happy and safe Christmas, and a very satisfying and fulfilling New Year.

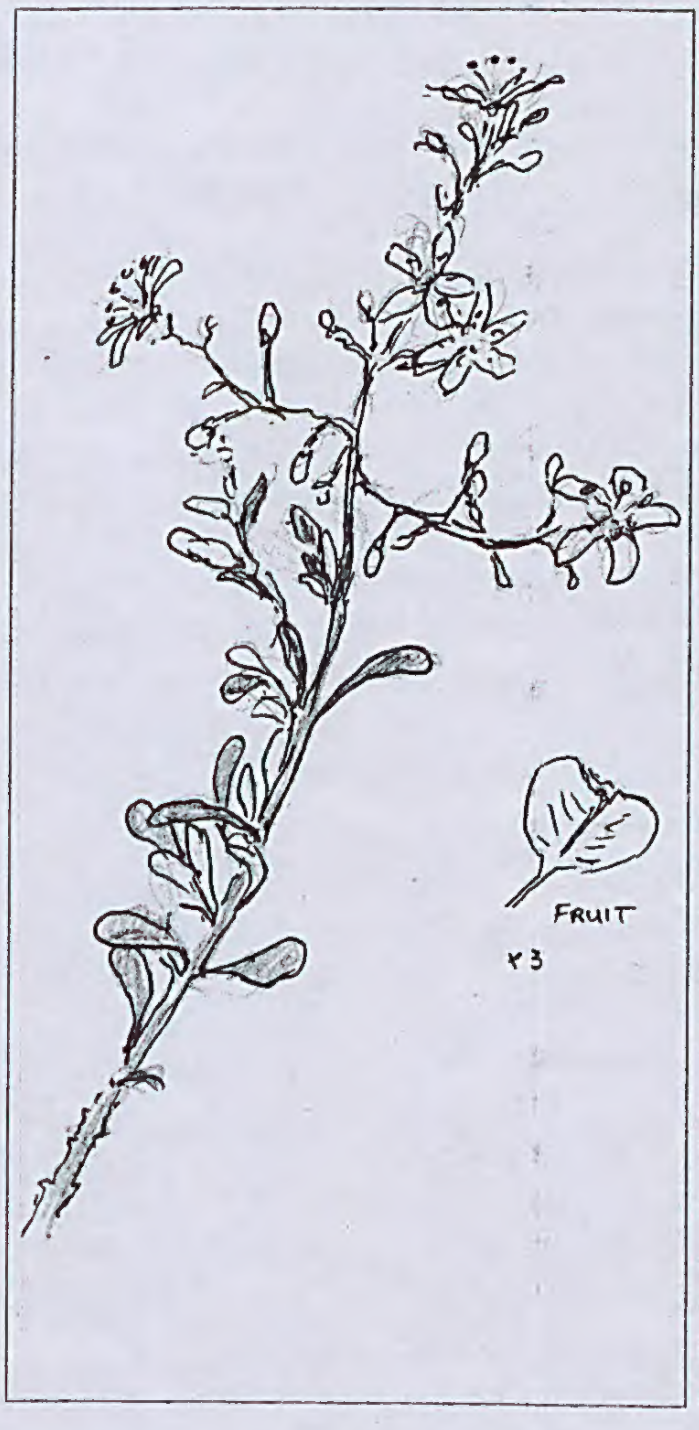
PLANTS OF THE MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Sweet Bursaria

(*Bursaria spinosa*)

Sweet Bursaria has been in the news lately as the food plant of the Eltham Copper Butterfly. For those who attended the launch of the signs and then walked up to the butterfly area, those straggly plants may have not looked very impressive, yet they are essential, along with the attendant ants, to the survival of the butterflies, which is why those ones look so chewed!

In other parts of the drier bush around Castlemaine the shrub is still rather tall and straggly, with creamy-white five-petalled flowers about 5 - 8 mm across in a pyramid shaped panicle about 10 cm long at the end of the branchlets during December and January. At Glenluce the specimens are small trees covered in a froth of blossom at flowering time.



The leaves are small and ovate, shiny dark green on the upper surface and whitish under.

The branches may or may not have spines.

The fruit give it its name, being shaped like a tiny purse, hence 'bursaria', from the Latin 'purse' or 'bag'. They are brown when ripe, opening at the top to release two or three kidney shaped seeds and persist on the plant until the following spring.

This is a very variable species, and the population in the Botanic Gardens has two subspecies, *Bursaria spinosa ssp. spinosa* and *B. spinosa ssp lasiophylla*, which are really quite difficult to tell apart.

Rita Mills

PROGRAM

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. **Also note** that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

Business Meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri. Dec. 14 **Members and Visitors Night.** Your night to bring the club a short talk, a few slides, a book review, etc., etc. Start thinking. "Bring a plate" Christmas Supper. UCA hall at 8pm

Sat. Dec. 15 **Far-side of Cairn Curran** - excursion and picnic tea. Leave 13 Mostyn Street at **3.30pm.** A telescope will be available thanks to Margaret Badminton. Note time change.

Fri. Feb. 9 Annual Meeting. Speaker, Shirley Diez of DNRE. UCA hall at 8pm.

Sat Feb. 10 Excursion to Kong Meng reserve near Tullaroop, and tea at Tullaroop after. Meet at 13 Mostyn St. at **3pm.** Note change of time again.

Fri. 8 - Mon. 11 Mar. 02. **VFNCA Campout** based at Campaspe Downs Country Resort at Tylden near Kyneton. Theme of the Camp is **Volcanoes and Mineral Springs of Central Victoria**. Copies of the Information and Registration forms available at the November meeting.

Sat. Apr. 14. **Sutton Grange**. A visit to Jock McRae's property . This is the 10th anniversary of the original LandCare plantings on the property. The celebration will include an inspection of the plantings, and some more planting done. further details nearer the time.

Fri. May 10. **Bats** Speaker is Lindy Lumsden of DNRE.. UCA hall at 8pm.

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Articles for the Newsletter can be left at Tonks Brothers or posted to RSD 181, 118 Blakeley Rd., Castlemaine, 3450. If you are sending it on a floppy disk Lotus Word Pro and Rich Text are best, Wordpad and Word for Windows 97 are useful. Ed.

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Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

2001 Committee E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.). ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

Subscriptions for 2001 -

Ordinary Membership: Single ,$22 Family, $30 Pensioner or student: Single $19 Family $24 Supporting: $31 The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.
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